

Food Forest Report April 2024

A wet winter has limited some activities in the food forest. However, volunteers have met several times and increased the bed sizes, planted whips and other plants. At present much of the new planting is still to fully emerge so the site looks sparse. However as the growth emerges and later planting and sowings are made we can expect more abundance.

We had one recent setback when EDDC responded to our request to cut the grass as we were running an event with their community/housing team. We had asked to be called when cutting took place so we could point out where small plants were emerging along the hedgerows and at the base of trees. Unfortunately no calls were received and many newly planted whips were destroyed. This has now been dealt with, new plants are being sourced and will be planted asap. Fortunately we had arranged to meet EDDC managers on site that day and we all arrived as the cutting was completed. Steps are now being put in place by EDDC to ensure this situation does not reoccur. It's a setback but hopefully now resolved.

In addition to the hundred or more people that attended our joint event we get frequent visitors, have an enquiry about using the site for forest school activities and have featured on a DWT zoom conference on Community Gardens. See <https://www.bitesizedgardening.co.uk/sidmouth-community-food-forest-the-video/food-forests/>

Discussion has also taken place with EDDC staff on the possibility of sowing wild flower seed in the adjoining orchard area, creating a hedge and creating an Improving Green Spaces Area. Food Forest volunteers and others are willing to plant the hedges, maintain the area and produce a management plan.

Fire Beacon Hill

Local volunteers are working with the RSPB to measure the impact of the geofenced cattle grazing at Fire Beacon and in the adjoining Woodland Trust owned Core Hill Wood.

The first survey of spring ephemerals has taken place and three additional visits will be carried out over the summer. The method being used is DAFOR scoring and this will give a measure of the dominance or rarity of herbaceous plants on site. An aggregated score will be provided to RSPB and WT with agreed additional work such as grazing impact on bluebell distribution and related factors. Each survey will create a baseline and then continue over several years to measure change over an extended period. Additional work will be carried out as the need arises and will be used to inform management of the sites and, longer term, potentially beyond.

In addition there are additional regular surveys of birds etc.

